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ABSTRACT

In 1985, California launched a 2-year curriculum reform initiative in history and social science that could eventually bring new standards of learning in these areas. Professional studies and student surveys relate a common message: a more extensive, literature-based, issue and idea-oriented curriculum, and better teaching methods would increase student knowledge and enthusiasm for their national and international heritage. School board members nationwide soon will be confronted with the issue because new instructional materials will be published to capture the lucrative California market. Unless school board members begin the curriculum review process now, they soon may face the dilemma of having new textbooks with a body of knowledge and a format that are incompatible with their current institutional standards. To ensure classroom success, new learning material should be supported by a sound curriculum, staff resources, and the community. (TE)

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Curriculum revolution: history-social studies—K-12!

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To celebrate the U.S. Bicentennial (and to fulfill its state mandate to adopt a new curriculum guideline), California launched a two-year odyssey in 1985 that eventually could bring new standards of learning in history and social science to the nation's public schools.

The reform is part of a heightened national awareness that social studies curriculum and instruction need improvement. A wide range of professional studies and student surveys relate a common message: a more extensive, literature-based, issue and idea-oriented curriculum, and better teaching methods would increase student knowledge of and enthusiasm for their national and international heritage.

"Significant resources must be devoted to the effort; it must be considered as long-term reform," says Gordon Cawelti, executive director, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. "Local school boards must devise the strategies best suited to their districts. Key to its success is the involvement of teachers in the change," he says.

Local districts can act

According to California State Superintendent Bill Honig, the new standards will "strengthen and enrich what students learn in history and the social science not only in California but throughout the nation as well."

The multi-disciplinary 13-year program approved unanimously by the State Board of Education last July (the *History-Social Science Framework)* accepts the challenge offered by U.S. Education Secretary William Bennett in the recently released *James Madison High School: A Curriculum for High School Students* (and the earlier companion on elementary education, *First Lessons*) to restore the "central importance of history" to its rightful place in a required sequence of social studies courses. Bennett cites as conditions needing reform the poor performance of students on standardized tests and the fact that average high school students take only 1.4 years of history instruction (far less than their European contemporaries).

School board members nationwide soon will be confronted with the issue because new instructional materials will be published to capture the lucrative California market. As one of the two largest purchasers of texts (the other being Texas), California is a major influence on the content and format of instructional materials that are marketed to the nation's schools.

Unless school board members begin the curriculum review process now, they soon may face the dilemma of having new textbooks with a body of knowledge and a format that are incompatible with their current instructional standards. To insure classroom success, new learning material should be supported by a sound curriculum, staff resources, and community support.

Local school boards can upgrade their curriculums without waiting for new state standards. Says California Deputy Superintendent Jim Smith, "This work is fundamental to fulfilling their educational role. School board members need to take the time to develop a curriculum based on what all children should learn. Listen to the advice of experts and regular people. Try to have a point of view. Listen to people—both leaders and teachers—who know the field from all educational levels."

Moreover, school board members can be leaders in the reform movement, instead of waiting to respond to a national trend. According to Smith, local school board initiative is crucial: "School boards are the market for publishers. Ask the right questions. Don't adopt the bad textbooks. No matter who the authors are, do not allow superficiality."

Writes Bennett in *James Madison*, "The bottom line is this: realizing curricular improvement may take work—new laws, better teacher training, improved textbooks—but that does not make these improvements impossible, or any the less desirable. Indeed, they are a national imperative."

How it developed

In 1983, as part of the educational reform movement, new California legislation required the Department of Education to develop model curriculum standards and textbook selection criteria. The state testing program was expanded to include social studies and science as well as reading and math. Problem-solving skills and the ability to apply knowledge replaced the traditional emphasis on basic skills mastery.

A comparison of the 1984-85 and 1985-86 eighth grade scores showed a seven point decline, with the largest drop occurring in citizenship and government subject matter. Basic skill areas showed the least decline. According to the report, students had the most difficulty "understanding concepts, principles, ideals, and the links between historic events and the present.

"Students who are unaware of critical connections will not be able to make reasoned decisions on contemporary issues, and their ability to participate effectively in a democracy will be limit-

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ed," conclude the authors of the California Assessment Program Annual Report for 1986.

Expected results

If the reform succeeds, "students will have the capacity to make wise choices in their own lives and to understand the swift-moving changes in state, national, and world affairs." By the time students are graduated, they will know "that history is not simply the ebb and flow of impersonal forces but is shaped and changed by the ideas and actions of individuals and government . . . . how people in other times and places have grappled with fundamental questions of truth, justice, and personal responsibility. . . . and how we deal with the same issues today," according to the *Framework's* guidelines.

"We expect the new curriculum to produce higher test scores as well as better writing in these areas," says Diane Brooks, manager, History-Social Science Unit, California State Department of Education.

A new testing program will monitor the progress and guide the continuing efforts to improve and share the best instructional methods developed by teachers.

A new "basics"

The *Framework* brings the "back to basics" approach, now in widespread use in reading, English, and math curriculums, to social studies by integrating the humanities into the study of state, U.S., and world history. The materials differ from most current curricula (usually textbooks) described in the U.S. Department of Education's *Nation at Risk* (1983) as "homogenized, diluted, and diffused to the point that they no longer have a central purpose." The *Framework* clearly tells publishers the types of materials that will be purchased for California public schools:

> Superficial skimming of key facts and the mere mention of major topics and significant individuals are not acceptable. Once chosen for discussion, a topic must be presented in depth, with a beginning, a middle, and an end; and it must be presented with careful attention to the skillful interweaving of history, geography, the humanities, and the perspective of the social sciences. Publishers at all times must think of their readers (or viewers) as an audience, whose interest, attention, and respect must be earned and held.

New material

"We will publish it if the *Framework* is pedagogically sound and takes off," says Roger Rogalin, senior vice president of development, D.C. Heath and Company.

State officials promise that only instructional resources that satisfy the criteria set forth in the *Framework* will make it on the list of approved K-12 history and social studies materials. Recently the California State Department of Education hosted a national textbook forum to make publishers aware of the new evaluation standards for instructional resources.

In addition to a dramatic change in textual content, the *Framework's* authors urge publishers to submit "formats other than a single heavy hardbound book . . . . such as small hardbound or softcover books or pamphlets, each of which presents a rich and complete story; diary excerpts, biographies, and so forth . . ."

Until new texts are adopted in the early 1990's, teachers will rely on the model curriculum guides and literature lists now under development. These teaching materials will include an annotated bibliography, a broad range of enrichment studies, and appropriate resources for students with limited proficiency in the English language.

Curriculum goals

The *Framework* describes these learning goals:

- To integrate history and geography with the humanities and the social sciences. The instructional effect is to deepen and enhance the traditional areas of study with the "ideas of great thinkers, major religions, and principal philosophical traditions."
- To enrich the content of elementary education.
- To teach democratic values and hold them up as a measure against which we may judge ourselves as well as others.
- To treat ethical and religious ideas seriously and examine their consequences.
- To allocate three years to the study of world history, the most time required by any state.
- To recognize the multicultural character of American society (pluralism) now and in the past.
- To incorporate the teaching of critical thinking into the content of each course.
- To teach about global relationships and the political and cultural barriers that divide people as well as the common human qualities that unite them.

Role of teachers

For the curriculum to succeed, teachers must see themselves as ambassadors to the next generation, according to the *Framework's* authors. Teachers should use a variety of resource materials to foster among students an enthusiasm for history, respect for American democratic traditions, and an understanding of global interdependence.

Practically there will be a different working relationship among teachers. Subjects formerly considered as separate entities (history, geography, economics, political science, anthropology, psychology, sociology, and the humanities) are now woven together into the fabric of history.

Cooperative planning among teachers from different subject areas, team teaching, and collaborative instructional strategies are recommended. Teachers are encouraged to make full use of community resources, computer software, films, and visual aids; "active learning" techniques such as debates, role playing, simulations, mock trials, local and oral histories, and mapping activities should be integrated into the curriculum whenever possible.

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Initial and continued teacher training is necessary for the curriculum to succeed in California and elsewhere. Many current elementary, social studies, and history teachers received insufficient training in areas such as ethical and religious ideas, in-depth world history, literature, cultural traditions, and historical themes.

Smith estimates training costs of $3,000-4,000 per teacher, the same amount necessary for any type of teacher education requiring three to four weeks of summer sessions and follow-up work during the school year. Ultimately, the state will work with college and university schools of education to have the *Framework's* content and methods incorporated in teacher training programs.

In the meantime, state officials are encouraging teachers to attend statewide curriculum institutes and to take advantage of existing resource centers.

Elementary education

Dramatic change is in store for elementary students who will see history and social studies instruction moved to the front burner alongside English and math. A formal sequencing of study, an increase in the number of instructional hours, and a variety of activities, field trips, and guest speakers will help convey the importance of the endeavor.

Elementary teachers will face an especially difficult transition because so little of the new subject matter was included in the traditional curriculum. The *Framework's* multi-disciplinary method requires an active, informed teaching style that enlivens the pages of history with richness and color. Teachers will no longer be able to rely on teacher's manuals, activity sheets, and chapter review questions.

The K-3 curriculum works with the idea of "home base" and elaborates the themes of "Learning and Working Now and Long Ago," "A Child's Place in Time and Space," "People Who Make a Difference," and "Continuity and Change" with stories of people—"ordinary and extraordinary who came before and whose stories build sensitivity and appreciation for times past and historical continuity."

Grades four to eight

During these years history is brought to life through its people and events. Courses include *State History* (grade four); *U.S. History and Geography: Making a New Nation* (grade five); *World History and Geography: Ancient Civilizations* and *Medieval and Early Modern Times* (grade six and seven); *United States History and Geography: Growth and Conflict* (grade eight).

Grades nine to twelve

The goal is to "provide learning opportunities that challenge students' growing abstract analytical thinking capabilities." Required courses include *World History, Culture, and Geography: The Modern World* (grade ten); *U.S. History and Geography: Continuity and Change in the Twentieth Century* (grade eleven); *Principles of American Democracy*; *Economics* (one semester each in grade twelve).

Making it work

A recent California study, *How State Education Reform Can Improve Secondary Schools*, focused on 17 schools that "were active in implementing earlier reforms." All of the schools showed significant improvement in test scores and learning conditions for students of all ability levels. The reforms led to increased attention to curriculum, instruction, and the "process of school change."

The study identified several critical factors necessary to achieve successful reform:

- local leaders who take an active role and have a clear vision of and belief in the reforms;
- an upgraded curriculum balanced at each school site by concern for student self-esteem, teacher cooperation and morale, and overall social responsibility;
- a positive school climate;
- the active involvement of teachers and administrators;
- a shared vision between the district administrators and school officials as well as between teachers and administrators within each school.

Road to reform

"There is a lot going on nationally in the field of social studies curriculum," says Bert Cieslak, director of council services for the National Council for the Social Studies. "The publication of the *Framework* has increased the attention being paid to the field and will probably encourage the recent trends toward active learning and a stronger curriculum."

Successful curriculum change will depend on the direction and support it receives from local school boards. California's *Framework* adds fuel to the fires of reform: a national consortia of middle and high school teachers are working on a social studies curriculum for the future; additional student testing and surveys will continue to remind the community that the next generation often is ill-prepared to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. However, only school boards can make the policy, mobilize the community support, and commit the resources for effective reform. ■

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specific school/work setting. A placement decision is made and reviewed as often as necessary. In some cases a child's participation in extracurricular or athletic activities may be restricted.

A medically and legally sound policy can serve the best interests of infected persons (child or adult) by insuring their education and employment rights. Encouraging infected persons to disclose their medical condition can insure that school officials are notified of any outbreaks of contagious illnesses such as chicken pox, flu, colds, measles, and hepatitis which pose a greater risk to AIDS victims (whose immune systems are already in jeopardy). ■

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- **Personal campaign contributions.** Employees may not directly or indirectly coerce, attempt to coerce, command, or advise a fellow employee to pay, lend, or contribute anything of value for political purposes in connection with a school board election.
- **Signing petitions.** Employees may not initiate, circulate, or canvass for signatures on election petitions.

What to do

Policies can be an appropriate place for school boards to establish clear expectations of professional employee duties and conduct including rules governing employee participation in school board elections.

Partisan activity, especially when it involves an employer, may produce short run gain, but also the long run risks of community backlash, an ineffective working environment, and internal divisions within the teaching profession. As much as school board politics is of concern to teacher unions, employee participation in the elections of their employers is a legitimate concern of school boards. ■